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Treehouse

By

JOE MUSSO

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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JOE MUSSO

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(TREEHOUSE)

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“*Treehouse* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by Cottage Theatre in Cottage Grove, Ore.”

Treehouse received its world premier production at Cottage Theatre in Cottage Grove, Ore., on Aug. 10, 2018.

CAST:

Johnny Malakhai Schnell
Alana Clare McDonald
Oliver Blake Nelson
Ben John Eckstine
Mrs. Ross Chelsey Megli
Susan Tracy Nygard

PRODUCTION:

Director Tara Wibrew
Assistant Director and Set Designer Kory Weimer
Stage Manager Randall Brous
Technical Advisor Tony Rust
Set Construction and Painting..... Alan Beck, Sophie Blades,
Randall Brous, Wayne Gonterman,
Ashley Lawn, Blake Nelson,
Mackenzie NesSmith, Tracy Nygard,
Tony Rust, Marisela Taylor, Kory Weimer
Costumes..... Chris Carter
Props Randall Brous
Lighting Design Amanda Ferguson
Light Board Operator..... Marisela Taylor
Sound Design Tyler Travers
Sound Operator Cosette Adamson
Promotional Videos..... Matthew Goes
Photography Matt Emrich, Emily Bly

Treehouse

CHARACTERS

JOHNNY (m): 17, thin, mentally 53 years old, only one who can see/hear Susan.

ALANA (w): 17, ethereal beauty, understated popularity in school.

OLIVER (m): 17, Johnny and Ben's friend, wears thick glasses.

BEN (m): 17, Johnny and Oliver's friend, wise guy, crude.

MRS. ROSS (w): late 30s, Johnny's mother, plain looks.

SUSAN (w): late 40s, Johnny's wife, beautiful actress, an apparition, died in 2016.

SETTING: The play primarily takes place over six months in 1980 in a suburb in the United States. Much of the play is set in Johnny's treehouse. The treehouse has walls and a roof and is furnished with an old bookcase, an old table, and unmatched chairs. One of the chairs, referred to in the play as the "reading chair," is overly large and comfortable. An old manual typewriter is on the table. The treehouse has at least two windows and an entrance reached by an offstage rope ladder either stage left or stage right. One of the windows is a portal into Johnny's mind where Susan's apparition often appears.

NOTE: Words in brackets [] indicate lines implied but not spoken.

Treehouse

Scene 1

(The hallway of JOHNNY's house. February 13, 1980. Two a.m. JOHNNY, wearing only pajama bottoms, walks from the dark into a small pool of light. He puts a handgun to his head. His hand shakes. His throat makes a primitive, guttural sound. SUSAN appears beside him. In the play, only JOHNNY sees and/or hears SUSAN.)

MRS. ROSS *(offstage)*. Johnny.

SUSAN *(gently takes the gun)*. No, my love.

MRS. ROSS *(offstage)*. Johnny.

JOHNNY. Susan?

SUSAN. Go.

MRS. ROSS *(offstage)*. Where?

SUSAN *(gently pushes him)*. Go.

(SUSAN disappears. MRS. ROSS, wearing a nightgown, steps into the light.)

MRS. ROSS. There you are.

JOHNNY. Huh?

MRS. ROSS. You're—

JOHNNY. Momma?

MRS. ROSS. Sleepwalking.

JOHNNY. You—

MRS. ROSS. You're sweating—

JOHNNY. How can—

MRS. ROSS. Shaking.

JOHNNY. But—

MRS. ROSS. It's two in the morning.

JOHNNY. You—

MRS. ROSS. Two—

JOHNNY. Can't—

MRS. ROSS. Two, Johnny.

JOHNNY. Where *am* I?

MRS. ROSS. The hallway.

JOHNNY. What day is it?

MRS. ROSS. What—

JOHNNY. Day.

MRS. ROSS. Wednesday.

JOHNNY. No, I mean—

MRS. ROSS. The thirteenth.

JOHNNY. Year.

MRS. ROSS. Year?

JOHNNY. What *year* is it?

MRS. ROSS. 1980.

JOHNNY. Can't be.

MRS. ROSS (*takes his arm*). C'mon.

JOHNNY (*resists*). But—

MRS. ROSS. What?

JOHNNY. Why? ... How?

MRS. ROSS. Why how what?

JOHNNY. 1980. My body.

MRS. ROSS. This way.

JOHNNY. I—

MRS. ROSS. Back to bed.

(Fade to black.)

Scene 2

(High school. February 13, 1980. Midday. ALANA, wearing a football letterman's jacket too large for her, sits on a small bench and reads Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra. She discovers a line she likes and writes it in a notebook; then she returns to reading the play. JOHNNY and OLIVER enter. JOHNNY sees ALANA and stops so suddenly that OLIVER runs into him.)

OLIVER. Damn, dude.

JOHNNY. Man.

OLIVER. [You've] been a space cadet all day.

JOHNNY. There she is.

OLIVER. Who? ... Alana Goddard?

JOHNNY. With her notebook.

OLIVER. You're looking at her notebook? Most guys would not be looking at her notebook.

JOHNNY. She calls it her quotebook.

OLIVER. Her what?

JOHNNY. Quotebook.

(JOHNNY steps into ALANA's field of vision. ALANA sees JOHNNY but continues reading. JOHNNY returns to OLIVER.)

JOHNNY *(cont'd)*. A hello from her would melt me.

OLIVER. Alana? Speak to *you*?

JOHNNY. She will, first Saturday in April.

OLIVER. You're full of shit ... She's always reading.

JOHNNY. Uh-huh.

OLIVER. Wonder what?

JOHNNY. Shakespeare.

OLIVER. Yeah?

JOHNNY. But at the beach this summer, she'll read horror fiction, even a trashy romance.

OLIVER. *This* summer?

JOHNNY. Uh-huh.

OLIVER. You can read her mind?

JOHNNY. No.

OLIVER. Are you stalking her?

JOHNNY. No.

OLIVER. Yes you are.

JOHNNY. No, I'm not.

OLIVER. Mr. Creepy.

JOHNNY. I'm not stalking.

(JOHNNY steps back into ALANA's field of vision. Her eyes never leave her book. JOHNNY returns to OLIVER.)

JOHNNY *(cont'd)*. She's reading *Antony and Cleopatra*.

OLIVER. Let's go.

JOHNNY. One more minute.

OLIVER *(starts to leave)*. We don't leave, I'm gonna have one of those all-day boners.

JOHNNY *(in ALANA's direction)*. "Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand."

(The school bell rings.)

OLIVER *(mortified, seizing JOHNNY's arm)*. Dumbass.

(JOHNNY and OLIVER exit. ALANA looks in their direction. Fade to black.)

Scene 3

(Treehouse. First Saturday, April 1980. Morning. JOHNNY sits in the “reading chair.” He reads Shakespeare’s The Tempest and sips whiskey from a glass. OLIVER enters, followed by BEN, who carries a football.)

JOHNNY. “Hell is empty and all the devils are here.”

BEN. What?

JOHNNY. Shakespeare. *The Tempest*.

BEN. Are you gay?

JOHNNY. No.

OLIVER. Yes you are.

JOHNNY. Stop mocking homosexuals.

BEN. It’s Saturday morning.

OLIVER. No school.

BEN. And you’re reading a book.

JOHNNY. A play.

OLIVER. A play, while we—

BEN. Two strapping heterosexuals.

OLIVER. Are organizing a football game.

BEN. Tackle.

OLIVER. At Cecil’s house.

BEN. So stop bitching.

OLIVER. And get your ass up.

(BEN seizes JOHNNY’s book and tosses it out of a window.)

JOHNNY. Thy play doth soar.

OLIVER. *Get up!*

JOHNNY. No.

BEN. Yes.

JOHNNY. I'm not playing football today.

OLIVER. Why not?

JOHNNY. I have to finish my column for the school newspaper.

BEN (*pulls the page from the typewriter*). *Advice From an Old Man*. By Johnny I'm-a-Dick-for-Not-Playing-Football Ross.

(JOHNNY leaps out of the chair and unsuccessfully tries to take the page from BEN, who reads part of it.)

BEN (*cont'd*). What's compounded interest?

JOHNNY. Interest added to principal that also earns interest.

BEN. Interest?

OLIVER. Principal?

JOHNNY. It's how a teenager, who saves his money (*Snatches the page.*) can one day be a millionaire.

OLIVER. When are you going to stop pretending you're fifty-three?

JOHNNY. I *am* fifty-three.

BEN. Bullshit.

OLIVER. You're seventeen.

BEN. We were in kindergarten together.

OLIVER. You used to be cool before you started this old man shit.

JOHNNY. I was never cool.

(BEN takes a quick swig of the last of JOHNNY's whiskey and then violently spits it out.)

BEN. What the?

JOHNNY. Will you please not waste my whiskey?

BEN. That's what this is?

JOHNNY. I pay Randy's brother a fortune to buy it for me.

OLIVER. If you're fifty-three, why can't you buy your own alcohol?

JOHNNY. I have fifty-three years of life in this brain.

BEN. Brain?

JOHNNY. Fifty-three years of memory.

BEN. What brain?

JOHNNY. It's only my body that's seventeen.

BEN. I'd'a guessed twelve.

OLIVER (*feels JOHNNY's bicep*). Exercise. Does the body good.

BEN. Had your first wet dream yet?

JOHNNY (*to BEN*). Moron.

OLIVER. When did you start drinking?

BEN. And why didn't you tell us?

OLIVER. Your best friends.

JOHNNY. The truth? (*To BEN.*) In college, you develop a drinking problem.

BEN. Huh?

JOHNNY. Booze wrecks your life. Failed marriage. Estranged children.

BEN. I could never drink that stuff.

JOHNNY. You start with beer.

OLIVER. You're the one drinking alcohol, not Ben.

JOHNNY. Yes, but I never become an alcoholic, and you want to know why?

BEN. No.

OLIVER. I do.

JOHNNY. A beautiful woman once told me—

(SUSAN, holding a martini, appears in a window.)

SUSAN. Never let alcoholism ruin your love for drinking, Johnny. Promise?

(SUSAN disappears.)

OLIVER *(waves a hand in JOHNNY's face)*. Hello?

JOHNNY. Huh?

OLIVER. It's mean to call Ben a drunk.

BEN. Yeah, if you're making up shit, pretend I marry a hot piece and become a millionaire.

JOHNNY *(looks out a window)*. Damn. Miss Castleberry's dog has my copy of *The Tempest*.

(BEN and OLIVER also look out a window.)

BEN. I like ol' Rufus.

OLIVER. Dog's a beast.

BEN. Hey, Oliver has a new word for our vocabulary.

JOHNNY. God save me.

BEN. Tell him.

OLIVER. Ready ... Loins.

(JOHNNY puts his head in his hands.)

OLIVER *(cont'd)*. As in my loins burn for Alana Goddard.

BEN. *Goddard*? You mean goddess. Alana is a goddess.

OLIVER. True.

BEN. I'd chop off my left nut just to hold her hand.

JOHNNY. Do you two ever want to date in high school?

OLIVER. Alana Goddard would never date us.

JOHNNY. Not Alana.

BEN. Who then?

JOHNNY. Lotta fish in the sea.

OLIVER. Why date?

BEN. Yeah, we just want to get laid.

OLIVER. And we could, if we were handsome.

BEN. And popular.

OLIVER. And jocks.

BEN (*to JOHNNY*). But we're like you.

OLIVER. Ugly.

BEN. *Not* popular.

OLIVER. *Not* jocks.

BEN. Marching band.

OLIVER. At least I play a trumpet.

BEN. What's wrong with the tuba? I'm first chair.

OLIVER. It's a tuba, man. A tuba.

BEN. Girls prefer men with big instruments.

JOHNNY. Gentlemen.

BEN. Gentlemen?

OLIVER. Where?

JOHNNY. I wish I could say our pathetic social standing in high school won't matter after we grow into adulthood, and in large part, it won't. However, the psychological scars of adolescence never quite heal. If they did, psychiatry would be a dead science.

BEN. What the hell is he talking about?

OLIVER. More old man shit.

BEN. We could get laid?

OLIVER. We could?

BEN. If we settled for ugly girls. But you know what?

OLIVER. What, my amigo?

BEN. I'd rather jack off than fuck an ugly girl.

OLIVER. You sound just like William Shakespeare.

(BEN and OLIVER high-five.)

JOHNNY. And you both sound like, nay, are misogynists.

BEN. Hurrah! *(To OLIVER.)* What's a misogynist?

(OLIVER shrugs.)

JOHNNY. Note to self. Write a column, no, a series of columns, discussing famous feminist thinkers.

BEN. Feminine?

OLIVER. Something about girls.

BEN. Cool.

JOHNNY. *Feminism* is the advocacy of women's rights. Political, social, and economic equality to men.

OLIVER. What does that have to do with us?

JOHNNY. Everything. In this country—

(BEN lifts his leg and loudly farts.)

JOHNNY *(cont'd)*. In this country—

(BEN again lifts his leg and loudly farts.)

JOHNNY *(cont'd)*. You win.

(BEN lowers his leg.)

OLIVER. You do know people only read your column for the freak value.

BEN. I wipe my ass with it.